

#34

RECEIVED

23 OCT 2014

22 October 2014

The Hon Tony Piccolo MP
Minister for Emergency Services
GPO Box 668
ADELAIDE, SA, 5001

Attention: Tony Piccolo MP – Minister for Emergency Services

Dear Tony,

RE: A SAFER COMMUNITY DISCUSSION PAPER – SEPTEMBER 2014

You may recall that I submitted a paper to you dated 4th August 2014, in regard to the Emergency Services Sector Reform process. Having now read your "A Safer Community Discussion Paper – September 2014", I would like to take this opportunity to provide further input and comment as I believe I am duly experienced enough to do so – I have been a CFS Volunteer for 15 years and am a very active, young (27yo) frontline volunteer. I am also very passionate about providing a sustainable, professional, appropriately funded and appropriately supported volunteer fire and rescue service to my community. I am also very passionate – and at the moment concerned – about the ability of our sector to do this across the entire state, not just in my own community. This paper, like my previous, will focus on the frontline, because as a frontline volunteer, like many thousands of other volunteers, this is the part of the sector that concerns me most and has the greatest impact on my ability to provide the service to my community.

Duplication of Services

I can't help but feel that one of the most significant opportunities to reduce the expenditure within our sector and provide significant cost savings has been under-stated in the discussion paper. Although the discussion paper lists one potential opportunity as "*an ability for some brigades and units to combine into a community services group subject to community needs and support*", there is no detail on how such a model may be achieved and doesn't seem to attract much focus in this paper. The proposed model of "*one organisation, delivering three services*" will help to reduce duplication at the top and middle parts of our sector, but will not do anything (or very little) to reduce the excessive duplication at the bottom end of our sector (based on what I can interpret from this discussion paper). Duplication that exists between all three emergency services organisations (ESO's), SAMFS, SACFS and SASES by way of:

- Firefighting resources between MFS and CFS;
- Rescue and storm/salvage resources between CFS and SES;
- Rescue and storm/salvage resources between MFS and SES.

I must be honest, this disappoints me because there are substantial opportunities to streamline, optimise and significantly improve our frontline services if we can get past the hurdle of needing to preserve the current 3 ESO structure in its current form at the frontline.

In an ideal world, I would like to think we could make the transition from a sector with 3 ESO's to a sector with 1 ESO in line with the proposed single organisational structure, however I believe this would be too greater step to be made in one go (maybe one day we could achieve this). A much more realistic and achievable step would be to reduce the sector from 3 ESO's down to 2 ESO's with a clear distinction between the 2 ESO's – one being a paid (fulltime/retained) service (SAMFS), the

other being a volunteer service. Such a model would be achieved through the amalgamation of the CFS and SES into a single, re-badged, Volunteer Fire & Rescue Service.

Cost savings could be made across the entire state through the reduction in duplication by consolidating the CFS and SES to a single volunteer service, which could be re-invested to better equip, train and support our frontline volunteers. The key benefits of such a model would be as follows:

- Remove significant duplication that exists between CFS and SES;
- Reduce the number of vehicles, equipment, facilities and training required to support 2 or 3 ESO's in the same location;
- Deliver significant reduction in capital and operational expenses associated with the current duplication of infrastructure, vehicles and equipment across much of the state;
- Allow smaller volunteer bases to merge to form larger, stronger and more sustainable volunteer bases, with common, focussed efforts; and;
- Nullify turf wars and rivalry/competition that exists between CFS, SES and country MFS in many locations due to significant overlap and commonality between roles and responsibilities.

Since the first talk of sector reform, I have spoken with many volunteers from many areas of the state, and I am yet to find a country volunteer who doesn't acknowledge the significant opportunity and upside that my proposal presents and the tangible benefits that it could provide. I cannot therefore understand the reluctance or apprehension of the Government to not pursue this opportunity with more intent during this sector reform process. Perhaps, as I alluded to in my previous paper, *"the voices of a very small minority will be heard louder and longer for fear of redundancy, relinquishment of power/responsibility and fear of change in general."* It would be a real shame if this were the case.

Longevity of Country Volunteers

I would also like to again highlight my concerns in regards to the longevity of volunteers, particularly country volunteers and my concerns that our current multi service structure is not sustainable. In many locations around the state, my town included, many volunteers are already joint members of both CFS and SES. The taxpayer is therefore funding the same personnel to wear two uniforms, drive two sets of appliances, undertake two sets of training and occupy and maintain two facilities. Not to mention the burden placed on these volunteers to spread themselves across two different services and deal with the administration and bureaucracy of providing two services to the same community. I have also seen first-hand how this then creates competition for new members, rivalries and turf wars because of the excessive commonality and duplication of effort between the services. This is unfortunate, but it is reality in many areas of the state and will always be the case when you have two or more services doing the same job in the same location.

In a social climate where it is getting harder and harder to recruit and more importantly retain new volunteers and especially young volunteers, particularly in country and regional SA; I cannot see the sense in trying to support multiple emergency services in the one town/location. Ever increasing employment, family and cost of living pressures are only further acting to compound the situation and consistent downward trends in volunteer numbers over a long period of time support this view.

Conclusion

The proposed *"single organisation, delivering three services"* will remove some of the duplication within the sector and no doubt save some money. However my greatest fear is that the frontline volunteers will see little improvement in funding and support because the sector will still be faced with severe funding shortages and there will continue to be competition and inequity for funding across the 3 ESO's. And the same conflicts and rivalries will continue between ESO's at a local level, simply because of differing uniform and identity.

More needs to be done by this reform process to consolidate, strengthen, unify and ensure sustainable volunteer based fire and rescue services for our communities. I strongly believe this can only be achieved via a 2 ESO model, with a single, consolidated volunteer fire and rescue service, through the amalgamation of the CFS and the SES. As much as we are all proud of the history and identity of the CFS and the SES, it is the volunteers that make the service, not the colour of the uniform or the name of the service. At the end of the day, it will be the same people, doing the same job, but with a common, focussed, unified effort. At the very least, this sector reform must do more to facilitate, encourage and support the *"ability for some brigades and units to combine into a community services group subject to community needs and support"* and do so in a **timely manner**.

If we are serious about reforming the sector for a more sustainable future, let's do it properly, from top to bottom and let's do it now.

If you would like to discuss this matter with me further, I would be more than willing to do so. Please find my contact details below. Please also refer to my previous paper submitted on 4th August 2014 for further detail, information and justifications to support my proposals and recommendations.

Yours sincerely,

SA Country Fire Service Volunteer –